

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

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R 151615Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 361

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR, TS

SUBJECT: GOT VIEWS ON FRENCH ELECTIONS: FEAR OF LEFT AND
HOPE FOR MAJORITY

1. SUMMARY. WHILE GOT HAD STUDIOUSLY AVOIDED TAKING PUBLIC POSITION ON FRENCH ELECTIONS, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE DOUBT THAT TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT'S SYMPATHIES ARE CLEARLY WITH CURRENT MAJORITY. VARIOUS GOT OFFICIALS HAVE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED TO US THEIR CONCERN OVER IMPACT LEFTIST VICTORY COULD HAVE ON GOT-GOF RELATIONS, AND IN LARGER CONTEXT ON EUROPEAN POLITICAL STABILITY AND SECURITY. EDITORIAL IN GOT-CONTROLLED PAPER MARCH 14 EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE IN MAJORITY VICTORY NEXT SUNDAY. END SUMMARY.

2. PRO-MAJORITY ATTITUDE HAS BEEN REFLECTED IN TREATMENT GIVEN BY TUNISIAN MEDIA TO FRENCH ELECTIONS IN RECENT WEEKS. PAPERS, RADIO AND TV HAVE GIVEN PROMINENT COVERAGE TO STATEMENTS BY GISCARD D'ESTAING, BARRE AND CHIRAC.

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INvariably THIS COVERAGE HAS HIGHLIGHTED MAJORITY LEADERS' REMARKS ON NEED FOR STABLE GOVERNMENT AND DANGER OF "COLLECTIVIST ADVENTURES", ETC. GISCARD D'ESTAING'S REMARKS HAVE RECEIVED ESPECIALLY WIDE COVERAGE. DISCORD BETWEEN LEFTIST PARTIES HAS BEEN PUBLICIZED.

3. PSD PARTY-OWNED PAPER L'ACTION RAN MARCH 14 STORY ON

RESULTS OF FIRST VOTE UNDER HEADLINE "LEFT AHEAD BUT FAR FROM PAOER." GOVERNMENT-OWNED LA PRESS ENTITLED STORIES "THE MAJORITY, CONTRARY TO ALL EXPECTATION", "A SLAP IN THE FACE FOR THE POLLS" AND "THE APPEAL TO INTELLIGENCE HAS BEEN HEARD."

4. LA PRESSE ALSO CARRIED FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL ON ELECTIONS UNDER BANNER "LA FRANCE GAULLISTE." BECAUSE THIS EDITORIAL CLEARLY REPRESENTS OFFICIAL GOT VIEWS, IT IS SUMMARIZED BELOW:

"POLLS ARE MAJOR LOSERS IN FIRST BALLOT IN FRENCH LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. CONTRARY TO ALL EXPECTATIONS, THE MAJORITY HAS WON THE FIRST ROUND. NOTHING IS DEFINITE; THE LEFT, WHICH WAS EXPECTED WINNER, IS NOT YET BEATEN. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IT AND MAJORITY IS ALMOST INSIGNIFICANT. BY NEXT SUNDAY MANY VOTERS MIGHT CHANGE THEIR MINDS AND ABSTAINERS MIGHT DECIDE TO VOTE. THERE IS "RISK" SITUATION COULD CHANGE TOTALLY.

VICTORY OF MAJORITY IN FIRST BALLOT IN WHICH RPR TOOK LION'S SHARE PROVES, IF SUCH IS NECESSARY, THAT FRANCE REMAINS GAULLIST. FRENCH HAVE ANOTHER WEEK TO REFLECT, BUT GISCARD D'ESTAING SEEMS TO HAVE ALREADY CONVINCED THEM OF TWO THINGS AT LEAST -- UNION OF LEFT WILL NEVER KEEP ITS PROMISES AND INCREASE IN MINIMUM SALARY TO 2400

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FRANCS WOULD BE FOLLOWED AUTOMATICALLY BY CONSIDERABLE PRICE INCREASES. THAT IS, INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT, TO SAY NOTHING OF THREAT TO FRENCH SECURITY AND INDEPENDENCE WHICH LEFT'S REACHING POWER WOULD PRESENT. IDEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS APART, THEREIN LIES THE REAL CHOICE FOR FRENCH PEOPLE, ACCORDING TO MAJORITY. CHANGE IS GOOD, BUT HOW AND AT WHAT PRICE. BY VOTING FOR MAJORITY, IT SEEMS THAT FRENCH FEAR THIS ADVENTURE.

FOR THE LEFT, THERE IS NO MORE TIME FOR QUARRELS. PS AND PC ARE OBLIGED TO REACHED UNDERSTANDING, EVEN IF TEMPORARY, IF THEY WANT TO WIN. WILL WITHDRAWAL RULE BE APPLIED? MITERRAND HAS ALREADY DECLARED THAT, IF NEED BE, HIS PARTY WILL GO TO THESE ELECTIONS UNDER ITS OWN FLAG."

MAJORITY HAS LITTLE TO FEAR NEXT SUNDAY. LEFTIST VOTERS, MOST OF THEM MOTIVATED FOR THESE ELECTIONS, WOULD HAVE ALREADY VOTED IN THEIR TOTALITY LAST SUNDAY. ON THE OTHER HAND, MAJORITY, FORSEEING FROM THE BEGINNING A DEFEAT IN FIRST BALLOT, WILL BE UNITED ON MARCH 19 AND WILL PROBABLY CONFIRM ITS VICTORY OF LAST WEEKEND."

5. COMMENT: GOT HAS NEVER MADE ANY SECRET OF ITS LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN FRENCH LEFT. TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT LAVUES CLOSE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND SECURITY COOPEATION WHICH HAS EVOLVED BETWEEN TUNISIAN AND FRANCE SINCE INDEPENDENCE AND IT DOUBTS THAT RELATIONS WITH LEFTIST COALITION COULD BE AS BENE-FICIAL. GOT IS ALSO SUSPICIOUS OF LONGSTANDING TIES BETWEEN PCF AND OUTLAWED TUNISIAN COMMUNIST PARTY AND OF SOCIALIST SUPPORT FOR BEN SALAHISTS. TO THIS IS ADDED GOT BELIEF THAT CGT WAS INVOLVED IN RECENT "ADVENTURISM" OF UGTT.

6. INTERNATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT. THE GOT FEARS THAT IN ANY REGIONAL CRISIS A LEFTIST COALITION WOULD BE MORE SYMPATHETIC TO RADICAL ALGERIA AND CONFIDENTIAL

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LIBYA THAN TO MODERATE TUNISIA. APART FROM QUESTION OF FRANCE ITSELF, GOT IS ALSO FEARFUL OF THE EXAMPLE A LEFTIST VICTORY IN FRANCE COULD HAVE IN SPANISH AND ITALIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS. IN VIEW OF TUNISIAN BELIEF THAT ITS SECURITY IS DIRECTLY TIED TO STRONG WESTERN (I.E. U.S.) PRESENCE IN MEDITERRANEAN, A SHIFT TOWARDS "EURO-COMMUNISM" IN ANY COUNTRY ON NORTHERN LITTORAL WOULD CONSEQUENTLY BE VIEWED WITH OPEN ALARM.

7. IN SHORT GOT DOES NOT TRUST FRENCH LEFT AND IT SINCERELY HOPES NEXT SUNDAY'S ELECTIONS CONFIRM ITS PREDICTIONS OF A VICTORY FOR PRESENT MAJORITY PARTIES.
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